



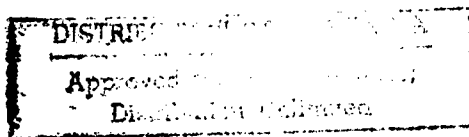
THE FACTORS THAT MOTIVATED AMERICAN GROUND  
FORCES TO FIGHT DURING COMBAT IN VIETNAM

THESIS

William A. Schum, Captain, USAF

AFIT/GSM/LAC/98S-1

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Logistics and  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Systems Management

William A. Schum, B.S.

Captain, USAF

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William A. Schum

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Abstract

Many people debate the policies of the United States government with respect to the conduct of the Vietnam War. The war was unpopular, at best, and many argued that our military should not have fought for South Vietnam. So, what compelled American ground forces to fight an atypical enemy? This thesis explores the motivational factors that influenced the military ground forces on a daily basis. Past research conducted on previous wars serves as the guideline for the methodology used. Combat narratives are the data sources and references to motivational factors by the authors are the data.

As a whole, the narratives examined in this study reveal that primary group, combat survival, leadership, and duty were all significant motivating factors with none of the four heavily outweighing the others. Additionally, the narratives were categorized with respect to the characteristics of the author and the author's combat experience. Of those categories, rank produced the most significant differences among motivational factors between groups. Leadership was a prominent motivating factor for officers while enlisted men fought for the good of the primary group and for combat survival.

# THE FACTORS THAT MOTIVATED AMERICAN GROUND FORCES TO FIGHT DURING COMBAT IN VIETNAM

## I. Introduction

### **General Issue**

Vietnam. One word can have multiple meanings. Some view Vietnam as a country. Some remember Vietnam as a war. Others equate Vietnam with failure. Whatever meaning the word Vietnam takes on, there can be no dispute that over 58,000 Americans died in a country, during a war, that, at least on a strategic level, ended in failure. Vietnam has as many negative connotations as it does positive denotations. Yet, the negative feelings toward the war did not evolve after the war's conclusion. The American soldier experienced many negative aspects of the war during the conflict while facing different enemies.

Indeed, the American soldier in Vietnam had multiple enemies. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) represented the classic enemy. The Viet Cong (VC) were just as deadly an enemy as the NVA but were much more difficult to identify. The VC filled its ranks with the citizens that the American soldiers were sent to protect. Some could argue that the policy makers in Washington, D.C. and the military leadership acted as enemies, or at the very least, non-allies. The American public may have been a complicating factor, as well, inasmuch as the public did not unanimously lend its support to the military members fighting in Vietnam.

With all of these enemies working against the American soldier, there must have been something that compelled the combatants to continue to fight. Combat narratives often explain

the situations, but what do they tell about the motivating factors that were powerful enough to influence the American soldiers to face their enemies on a daily basis? The purpose of this research is to investigate combat narratives with the goal of finding the most significant factors that affected the motivation of American ground forces during the Vietnam War.

## **Relevance**

There are several reasons why factors that motivate ground troops are relevant to Air Force personnel. First is the possibility that the factors that motivate ground forces may also motivate Air Force members. Ground forces in Vietnam found themselves in situations that were similar to situations encountered by pilots. Ground patrols would leave the relative security of their base on search and destroy missions. Location of the enemy was not always known. Similarly, many wild-weasel sorties involved leaving the security of the air base for the hostile skies over North Vietnam. Location of enemy surface-to-air missile sites was not always known. Often, Air Force crew members were required to evade enemy forces after parachuting over hostile territory. In both cases, the war fighters required motivation to fight.

Another reason Air Force personnel should have knowledge of ground force motivation is the existence of joint force operations. At some point, Air Force members may be in a position to influence the actions of ground forces through either policy or strategy. Whether formulating policy or implementing strategy, knowledge of troop motivation is an asset. The military is an organization made up of multiple services. There is no good reason why Air Force personnel should not have knowledge of factors that motivate ground troops. Certainly, the different services have different missions; all the services work towards the same purpose. The military,

as an organization, can improve only if more members become familiar with the cultures and standards their sister services.

This study is also relevant in terms of the nature of the Vietnam War. Since 1917, the United States has sent its troops overseas to become involved in unpredictable, localized conflicts. These situations are usually volatile and unpredictable. Increasingly, armed conflicts in modern times are similar in nature to the Vietnam War. The factors which motivated ground forces in Vietnam may be identical to the factors which will motivate current forces to fight in Bosnia, the Middle East, or wherever American forces are needed.

The political undertones of the Vietnam War affected the troops. As Carl Von Clausewitz once said, "War is a continuation of policy by other means" (Clausewitz, 1984: 87). The United States will certainly be involved in politically motivated military actions in the future. The Vietnam War gives examples, through combat narratives, of how troops responded in an environment created by politically motivated military actions.

### **Research Objective and Investigative Questions**

The research objective of this study is to determine the most significant factors that motivated American ground forces during the Vietnam War as revealed in post-combat narratives written by combatants themselves. To answer the fundamental research objective, the first investigative question is to determine what constitutes motivational factors. The literature review included in Chapter II of this study addresses the nature of motivational factors and identifies factors used in this study to fulfill the research objective.

Other investigative questions need to be addressed. One has to do with the differences in military rank inasmuch as officers are typically motivated by different factors than are enlisted personnel. In theory, officers had more responsibility during the war and enlisted troops made up a much higher percentage of the ground forces. The differences in rank led to different roles and, in turn, may have led to differences in motivating factors. This study intends to reveal if officers were compelled to fight by factors different from those that drove enlisted personnel.

As the war progressed, the motivational factors may have changed. This study examines whether factors of motivation varied during the eight years of the ground war. The Vietnam War was extremely unpopular among military and civilian personnel in the latter half of the conflict. The political climate in America changed, along with the public's view of the military, as the war progressed. There is almost certainly a potential for discovering differing motivational factors between troops involved early in the war and troops involved in the latter half of the war.

Another area to investigate is the concept of expectations versus experience. Men came to Vietnam with certain expectations about the enemy, the men they would be fighting with, and combat itself. Vietnam was different from any earlier war that Americans were involved in due to the extensive guerrilla tactics applied by the enemy. The type of war created battlefield situations that rarely matched expectations. Expectations may have motivated new troops, while the reality of the war may have motivated experienced personnel.

The fourth investigative question is whether geography played a role in motivation. The Vietnam War was fought in many different locales throughout South Vietnam. At first glance, it may seem that combat near the demilitarized zone may have been more intense simply because it was closer to North Vietnam. Yet, as Stanley Karnow points out, "there were no secure areas in Vietnam. A GI assigned to an office in Saigon or a warehouse in Danang could be killed or

injured at any moment of the day or night by Communist mortars or rockets” (Karnow, 1991: 33). So, there is the possibility that geography did not alter motivation and that motivation to fight was consistent regardless of where American ground forces were located.

### **Assumptions**

This research examines works written about experiences in time period from the time when the U. S. Marines went ashore at Danang (March, 1965) until the time when the last American troops left Vietnam (March 29, 1973). The combat narratives reviewed in this study are from this eight-year period. The experiences of the men who fought during all eight years are equally important in determining motivating factors, just as all regions of fighting carry equal weight.

The first assumption of this study is that the authors of the combat narratives are a representative cross section of the ground forces involved in Vietnam. If the authors are a representative group, then the factors that motivated them are also representative. This assumption ignores the possibility that authors of combat narratives were more educated than their fellow soldiers who did not detail their experiences in a narrative. The representative cross section assumption also disregards the possibility that combat narrative authors had more capability to deal with the horrors of war than non-authors.

The second assumption of this research is that combat narratives are valid representations of the combat experience and do not significantly enhance or magnify the realities of the lived experience. If they are reasonably honest representations, then, they should reveal, in some form,



the motivations that enabled the author to fight. There is evidence of motivating factors in each narrative, whether the author directly or indirectly relates his reasons for fighting. This assumption disregards the possibility that some authors wrote their narratives simply to relate a specific battle or series of conflicts. Involuntarily or not, the authors may not have revealed all, or even the most pressing reasons that compelled them to face the enemy. Each combat narrative can have equal weight in determining the most significant motivational factors if the authors are honest in their revelations of combat experience.

The last assumption is that the authors of combat narratives reveal the most prominent factors that influenced their motivation. This assumption disregards the possibility that the authors held back information about the factors that truly motivated them. For purposes of this study, each combat narrative contains motivational factors, and those motivational factors are the principal factors that compelled the authors to continue through combat.

## **Terms**

Some terms must be defined. "Combat narrative" indicates a non-fiction, first-hand account of combat action during the Vietnam War. Authors of the combat narratives can be former officer or enlisted personnel. The narratives need only describe some period of time during which the author was in Vietnam.

The word "motivation" represents the soldiers' will to survive or to avoid risk in a combat environment. This study investigates different factors that created motivation. The factors compelled the combatants to fight or to refuse to fight. In that sense, the American

ground forces were all motivated by certain factors. The existence of these factors is of interest in this study.

## **Preview**

This chapter discusses the research objective and investigative questions of this study. Chapter II is a review of the literature pertinent to combat motivation. Chapter II also includes the list of motivational factors and the reasoning behind their selection. Chapter III provides an explanation of the methodology of the study. The criteria for identifying motivational references are the critical aspect to the methodology employed. Establishment of these criteria occurs in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents the analysis of the individual narratives. Chapter V displays the results of this study based on the data collected from all the combat narratives. Chapter VI includes answers to the investigative questions and the research questions, conclusions, findings and recommendations.

## II. Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The research in this study follows research accomplished in 1995 when Traversa studied World War II narratives in an attempt to identify the prominent motivational factors among American and German soldiers. Traversa's efforts were similar to those of Kellett (1987, 1982) and Moskos (1970). Each of the researchers developed his list of motivational factors. These lists are not identical and demonstrate the difficulty of identifying and categorizing motivational factors. Table 1 lists the motivational factors that each researcher used in his study.

Table 1. Motivational Factors

TRAVERSA - 1995	KELLETT - 1987	KELLETT - 1982	MOSKOS - 1970
PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP
RELIGION			
IDEOLOGY	PERSONAL VALUES	IDEOLOGY	LATENT IDEOLOGY
ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENEMY			
GROUP LEADERSHIP	LEADERSHIP	LEADERSHIP	
NATIONAL LEADERSHIP			
PERSONAL GRATIFICATION	REWARD & RECOGNITION	REWARDS	
PROPAGANDA	PRECONCEPTIONS OF COMBAT	PRECONCEPTIONS OF COMBAT	
VINDICTIVENESS			
DESIRE TO END THE WAR	MANPOWER ALLOCATION	MANPOWER ALLOCATION	ROTATION
COERCION			
DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY			HONOR
	COMBAT	COMBAT	COMBAT SITUATION
	DISCIPLINE	DISCIPLINE	
		UNIT ESPRIT	
		TRAINING	
			AMERICANISM

Moskos identified his factors based on interviews with American enlisted personnel serving in Vietnam in 1965 and 1967. The timing is important because the attitudes of American soldiers changed at some point after 1967 when the war became intensely unpopular and unpredictable. This study includes expectations and coercion as motivational factors, both of which Moskos did not recognize.

The difficulty in identifying motivational factors includes determining which factors are independent and which are sub-categories of others. Kellett based his work on soldier performance in Calais during 1940, Burma during 1944, Korea during 1951, and the Golan Heights during 1973. As with Moskos, Kellett does not include religious belief as a separate motivational factor. Yet, each researcher includes religious convictions under other motivational factors. This study separates religion from personal ideology and identifies each as a category of motivational influence.

Traversa's work is based on World War II narratives of American and German forces. Traversa separated religion and ideology, but he omitted combat as a motivational factor. The other researchers included combat just as this study includes combat survival as a motivational factor that compelled American ground forces to fight. The fundamental difficulty in identifying motivational factors is determining which should be included in the research. The list of possible factors is extensive, and Traversa omitted certain factors that Kellett and Moskos included, yet he included certain factors that Kellett and Moskos left out. In each case, the researcher determined which motivational factors were relevant to his study.

Another difficulty that this type of study presents is determining the relative importance of each motivational factor. Traversa, Kellett, and Moskos give compelling arguments to justify their choice of motivational factors. This study includes some factors that are common to the

previous research, but not all. The motivational factors of this study are based on the pertinence of motivational factors to the Vietnam War setting. For example, Moskos distinguished latent ideology from “Americanism” and included both in his list of motivational factors. After Moskos finished his research in 1967, the Vietnam War became very unpopular. Few troops in the latter portion of the war were motivated by traditional ideals. Therefore, this study includes patriotism under the larger classification of ideology.

Qualitative inferences serve as the basis of decision and are open to a wide range of interpretation. This chapter describes the motivational factors included in this study and explains their importance. The significance of each factor is the justification for its inclusion in this research.

## **Theory of Motivation**

Military leaders have always been interested in the factors that compel men to fight. Over the years, researchers have attempted to identify these factors. In *The American Soldier*, the authors conduct an extensive study of how combat and the American serviceman interact. According to the research, the United States Army “does tend to elicit and encourage certain motivational patterns, which recur with a certain degree of uniformity” (Stouffer and others, 1949: 106). The uniformity is important because similarities can exist across generations and between wars. The Vietnam War was different from World War II in several ways, but some men fought for the same reasons despite the differences of the situations. Finding these common threads of motivation can be beneficial to the military as a whole.

## **Primary Group**

The first motivational factor defined in this study is that of the primary group. The primary group is the squad or platoon of which the author of the narrative is a member. The motivation the author feels is that of unit spirit. Soldiers feel a need to protect the primary group (Traversa, 1995: 48). An allegiance exists among men involved in small unit combat. Kellett states that soldiers are often isolated on the battlefield and become dependent on a small number of fellow soldiers (Kellett, 1982: 320). The squad or platoon usually becomes the group on which the soldier depends.

Cohesion among soldiers can be a powerful incentive to perform. Personal relationships create a motivation that can prevail over fear of combat (Moskos, 1987: 135). The individual soldier places value upon the lives of those he knows, a value that increases as the relationship continues. Soldiers rarely develop intimate relationships outside their primary group strong enough to evoke powerful motivational forces during combat. Due to emphasis and frequency of appearance in combat narratives, this aspect is most important.

## **Religion**

Religious convictions can be a strong motivational factor in combat as soldiers motivate themselves through prayer, or as religious leaders motivate the soldiers through inspiration. Kellett placed religion under the broader category of personal values in his 1987 research. Traversa made the decision to separate religion and ideology, claiming that religion aided cohesion and helped justify military action. This study distinguishes religion from ideology for the primary reason that American troops could object to communism and thus be subject to

strong political motivation. Action to resist communism is certainly ideological, though not religious in nature. The Vietnam War introduced many points of ideological concern that had little to do with religion. Accordingly, this study separates religion from ideology to determine the extent of purely religious motivational factors.

### **Ideology**

Some soldiers feel motivated by ideological factors other than religion. Political and personal beliefs can motivate men to fight in the same manner as the desire to protect a particular lifestyle. In Vietnam, a popular early rallying cry was to prevent the spread of communism. Some stressed the quality of the American way of life and the need to promote democracy. In certain instances, soldiers fought because they believed in the worth of their social system (Moskos, 147). For this study, ideology represents personal or political convictions other than religious values.

### **Leadership**

Leadership can occur at many levels. As commanders-in-chief, Presidents Johnson and Nixon were the ultimate leaders during the Vietnam War. General Westmoreland was the primary in-theater commander. The individual military units had leaders as well; some or all of these leaders motivated the combat soldier. Traversa concentrated on large group leadership as a motivational factor, while Kellett stated that "experienced officers and senior noncommissioned

officers” exhibit leadership that affects motivation (Kellett, 326-327). This study includes aspects of both researchers and reports motivation as a result of leadership at any level.

In this study, leadership denotes the leaders’ ability, or inability, to inspire subordinates or the leaders’ desire to provide inspirational leadership. The interaction can occur between officers and enlisted men or within the same rank. Combat alters the rank system in that “the combat situation itself [fosters] a closer solidarity between officers and enlisted men than [is] usual in the rest of the Army” (Stouffer and others, 119). Combat forces men to become leaders regardless of their rank.

## **Expectations**

A soldier’s preconceptions can “provide a yardstick of estimated costs” of battle (Kellett, 1987: 220). If the soldier’s preconceptions match reality, then motivation may be high. However, if the battlefield experience is markedly different from what the soldier expects, there is a chance for demoralization. Thus, expectations can play a crucial role as a motivational factor. The Vietnam War was much different from any other war Americans fought. The reality of fighting in the Southeast Asian jungles against the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) did not match the expectations of most soldiers. Because the reality of Vietnam significantly challenged the soldiers’ expectations, this study examines how the soldiers reacted to the difference.



## **Vindictiveness**

Vindictiveness, as a motivational factor, can be a subset of the primary group. The face-to-face relationships propagated by primary group interactions create strong allegiances between soldiers. Yet, the primary group promotes behavior on the order of protection. Vindictiveness is a retaliatory response to actions by the enemy. When a soldier witnesses the death of a friend, “a sense of revenge is kindled” (Traversa, 35). The guerrilla-style tactics of the VC and NVA gave American ground forces many opportunities for vindictive behavior. This study examines how American combatants dealt with the death of their companions and whether or not vindictiveness was a significant motivational factor.

## **Coercion**

Coercion is the threat of punishment as a motivation to fight. The Vietnam War setting is crucial to the selection of coercion as a motivational factor. During World War II, “coercion was not a major motivational factor for American soldiers” (Traversa, 37). Yet, the causes for which World War II was fought were not as unpopular among the troops as were the causes of their involvement in the Vietnam War. Traversa found that coercion was a significant factor among German troops during World War II. For whatever reason, factors that motivated German troops were different from those that motivated the American troops during the same war. The high number of draftees during the Vietnam War allows for the possibility that coercion was necessary to motivate troops to fight.

Yet, despite the threat of punishment, the threat of death from the enemy is even greater. The United States military simply does not execute men for refusing to fight. At the conclusion

of World War II, Under Secretary of War Robert Patterson revealed that “during the entire length of [World War II], the Army has executed 102 of its soldiers. All executions but one were for murder or rape. One was for desertion, the first execution for a purely military crime since the Civil War” (War Department, 1945). For the American fighting man, the enemy poses a greater threat than the coercive power of the military. The enemy attempts to kill the American soldier who fights, while the military judicial system normally will not kill the soldier who refuses to face the enemy.

## **Duty**

Duty represents the motivation to fulfill a specific combat-related task and can be historically represented. American soldiers have fought for centuries beginning in 1754 with the French and Indian War through the Gulf War in 1991. In every instance, uniformed soldiers have upheld the tradition of duty and met the requirements as professionals in the art of war. As professionals, soldiers are paid to perform and, as paid combatants, the soldiers’ job is to fight. Duty serves as a motivational factor through the paid nature of the profession and through the historical basis surrounding the American fighting man.

American and German troops fought out of a sense of duty during World War II (Traversa, 38) just as American troops felt a sense of duty during the Vietnam War. During the early stages of the war, many of the American troops were volunteers. As the war progressed, the percentage of volunteers dropped as more draftees were sent to fight. Volunteers most likely

felt a greater sense of duty than non-volunteers did. This study determines the role of duty as a motivational factor for the American soldier.

### **Combat Survival**

The battlefield can be a confusing, stressful environment. The immediacy of the battlefield motivates men if for no other reason than survival. Personal survival is often dependent on unit success. If the unit suffers from poor performance, there is a likelihood that an individual soldier's chance of death or injury increases. Therefore, the survival motivation drives soldiers to fight for their unit as well as for themselves.

The motivation to avoid injury or death may help a unit in the end. Kellett found that there exists "a strong relationship between wounding and subsequent breakdown after the soldier has rejoined the unit" (Kellett, 1987: 224). For this study, combat survival as a motivating factor focuses on the individual desire to survive. The primary group influence compels the soldier to protect others close to him. The combat survival influence compels the soldier to protect himself. Although primary group and combat survival are similar, the former encompasses behavior for the good of the group while the latter encompasses behavior for the good of the individual. The group versus individual difference is sufficient to separate combat survival from the primary group as a motivational factor.

## **Training**

Training differs from duty in that duty represents how a soldier is supposed act in theory and in response to payment and tradition. Training represents an automatic response to a combat situation. When the enemy attacks, a properly trained soldier will react according to what he has been taught. Training also gives the soldier "a degree of self-confidence in his military skills" (Kellett, 324). Training can motivate through automatic response and through confidence. Kellett found that the twentieth century soldier experiences greater realism in training. The realism of training goes a long way to promote automatic response and self-confidence in battle. In each case, the individual soldier is motivated to fight if his training is strong and less inclined to fight if his training is weak. This study determines the extent to which training was a motivational factor.

## **Summary**

This study uses factors identified by previous researchers. However, not all of the motivational factors of the researchers are included. Table 2 depicts the list of motivational factors utilized in this study along with the factors used by previous researchers.

This thesis determines which motivational factors played a significant role in motivating American ground forces to fight during the Vietnam War. Traversa studied American and German soldiers and airmen of World War II. Kellett studied World War II and the Korean War. Moskos examined American troop performance during the Vietnam War, but his research concluded in 1967. Most of the American casualties suffered in the Vietnam War occurred after

1967. Accordingly, this study determines how the progression of the war affected troop motivation.

This study uses ten significant motivational factors. Each of the ten appears in at least one other researcher's list in some form. No list is all-inclusive and for purposes of simplicity, this study includes only the ten factors that relate most closely to the experiences of American ground forces in Vietnam. Others may criticize the selection of the ten factors in this study, but the goal is to find the most significant factor. Therefore, the fact that the list includes ten, fifteen or twenty factors is less important than the discovery of the one factor that had the most impact on the motivation of American troops.

Table 2. Motivational Factors For This Study

SCHUM - 1998	TRAVERSA - 1995	KELLETT - 1987	KELLETT - 1982	MOSKOS - 1970
PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP	PRIMARY GROUP
RELIGION	RELIGION			
IDEOLOGY	IDEOLOGY	PERSONAL VALUES	IDEOLOGY	LATENT IDEOLOGY
	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENEMY			
LEADERSHIP	GROUP LEADERSHIP	LEADERSHIP	LEADERSHIP	
	NATIONAL LEADERSHIP			
	PERSONAL GRATIFICATION	REWARD & RECOGNITION	REWARDS	
EXPECTATIONS	PROPAGANDA	PRECONCEPTIONS OF COMBAT	PRECONCEPTIONS OF COMBAT	
VINDICTIVENESS	VINDICTIVENESS			
	DESIRE TO END THE WAR	MANPOWER ALLOCATION	MANPOWER ALLOCATION	ROTATION
COERCION	COERCION			
DUTY	DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY			HONOR
COMBAT SURVIVAL		COMBAT	COMBAT	COMBAT SITUATION
		DISCIPLINE	DISCIPLINE	
			UNIT ESPRIT	
TRAINING			TRAINING	
				AMERICANISM

### III. Methodology

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology used to study combat narratives. Table 3 depicts the eight-step sequential process of the research in this study. The first step consists of reviewing literature pertinent to this study. As mentioned, work accomplished by Kellett, Moskos, and Traversa is included in the literature review. The second step is to determine the method of analysis. Traversa's study serves as a guideline for establishing the analytical method used in this study and is described in detail later in this chapter.

After the analytic process is established, the next step of this research process is to select the combat narratives. Due to the nature of the Vietnam War, the combat narratives used encompass both officer and enlisted personnel as well as troops that served at different times in the war. The ultimate goal of this research is to find the most significant motivational factors of the war. The data should represent as many different personal situations as possible to find the most significant factors.

Table 3. Research Process Steps

Step	Title
1	Review Literature
2	Determine Appropriate Methodology
3	Select Representative Combat Narratives
4	Analyze Combat Narratives
5	Collect Results
6	Compare Results Between Narratives
7	Draw Conclusions
8	Make Recommendations

The fourth step is to analyze the combat narratives according to the defined methodology. Content analysis forms the basis of the methodology in this study. The following defends the appropriateness of the methodology:

Qualitative content analysis, which has sometimes been defined as the drawing of inferences on the basis of appearance or nonappearance of attributes in messages, has been defended most often, though not solely, for its superior performance in problems of applied social science. (Holsti, 10)

More discussion of content analysis will follow.

The results of the analysis are included in Chapter 4 and represent the fifth step in this research process. The results take the form of tallies and percentages that reflect the nature of motivational references found in the combat narratives. Using percentages, this study makes comparisons between the combat narratives to determine the most prominent motivational factors. These comparisons are found in the discussion section of Chapter 4.

The last step of this research process is located in Chapter 5. Conclusions, drawn from the data, respond to the research question as well as the investigative questions. Recommendations follow and complete Chapter 5, this research process, and this study.

## **Data Collection**

The initial data collection occurs as the combat narratives are read and references to a motivational factor are recorded on the tally sheet. Complete thoughts constitute a reference, but these thoughts may take the form of a phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Each motivational factor has corresponding identification criteria that are used to delineate among motivational factors.



The references in the combat narratives fall into categories based on the identification criteria that are listed in Table 4.

In this study, the researcher makes a qualitative decision concerning the nature of the motivational factor. The identification criteria provide guidance for that decision, yet the qualitative nature of the judgment allows room for subjective interpretation. A reference in the combat narratives must correspond to a motivational factor through the identification criteria listed. Otherwise, the reference is unclear and excluded from the data.

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis is growing in popularity as a means to assess written material. Experts in the field have defined content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 14). Despite the broad definition, successful content analysis depends on adhering to established requirements.

The first requirement is objectivity. This study creates objectivity through the identification criteria listed in Table 4. A criticism of content analysis is the “possibility that the findings reflect the analyst’s subjective predispositions rather than the content of the documents under analysis” (Holsti, 4). The process of developing the criteria listed in Table 4 should reduce subjectivity.

Table 4. Motivational Factor Identification Criteria

Primary Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- desire to be with unit members despite adverse circumstances</li> <li>- desire to protect unit members in the presence of danger</li> <li>- unit members cooperating in order to fight</li> </ul>
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prayer as a means to cope</li> <li>- support from God or religious leader</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- inspiration drawn from actions of superiors</li> <li>- need to set an example for subordinates</li> </ul>
Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- directly fighting for or against a political cause</li> <li>- belief in the virtue of a political cause as a reason to serve</li> </ul>
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- actions taken as a result of preconceived notions of combat</li> </ul>
Vindictiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- retaliation against enemy</li> </ul>
Coercion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fear of reprisal from others</li> <li>- threat of punishment</li> </ul>
Duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- personal belief in need to fulfill responsibility as a soldier</li> </ul>
Combat Survival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- situation forces actions in order to avoid death or injury</li> <li>- risk taken in order to promote best chance for future success</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- previous preparation forces automatic response to the situation</li> <li>- belief that preparation will enable successful combat operations</li> </ul>

The second requirement for successful content analysis is a systematic application of rules. Including materials that only support a hypothesis is not acceptable. This study is systematic in that all references to combat motivation are documented whether they are counter-intuitive or not. The goal here is to find the most prominent motivational factors of the Vietnam War. This research must be systematic or the goal can not be met.

The final requirement of content analysis is generality. In this study, the combat narratives must have theoretical relevance and must be comparable to one another. With that in mind, letters home from combat veterans were excluded from this study. Letters represent a single moment in time whereas narratives represent many moments in time. If an author describes his entire tour of duty, the chances are good that he reveals the factors that motivated him to fight throughout the course of his combat tour.

Figure 1 illustrates the content analysis research design of this study.

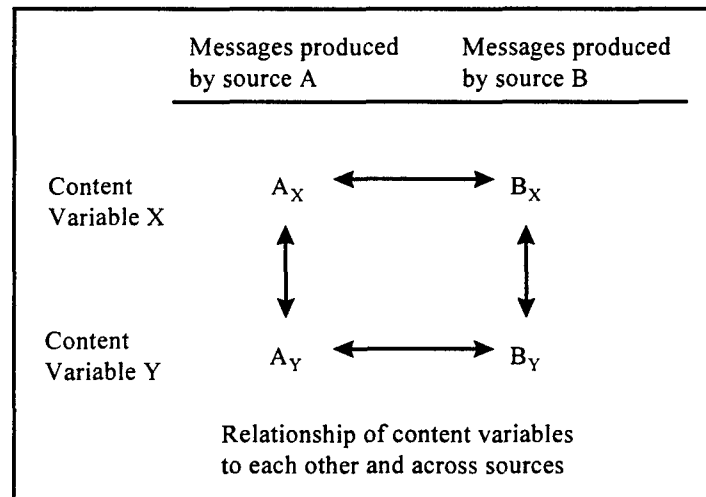


Figure 1. Research Design

The “messages” of each source are the references to motivational factors. The “content variables” are the ten categories of motivational factors (i.e. primary group, religion, ideology, etc.).

## **Tabulation**

The data collection yields tallies that can be converted to frequencies. For example, an author may make 100 references to motivational factors in his combat narrative. If 15 of those references fall into the "primary group" category, then the percentage of references to primary group motivation is 15%. In this manner, each motivational factor has a frequency for each combat narrative and the results become quantitative in nature. The nature of the results is important because "there is clearly no reason for content analysis unless the question one wants answered is quantitative" (Lasswell and others, 45).

Additionally, combat narratives are grouped in different categories and the total references in these groups have percentage ratings. For example, all combat narratives written by officers form a group. Groups are formed along the lines of rank, volunteer/draftee enlistment, date of service in Vietnam, and location of service in Vietnam. These different groupings provide insight into the motivational factors that influenced American ground forces in Vietnam.

## **Primary Factors**

After tabulation, the percentage rankings of the motivational factors are compared. Any factor that comprises 25% or more of the total references is a primary factor. A reference total of 25% serves as a solid baseline to delineate between primary and motivational factors. Traversa used 20% as a threshold in his study and found good results. This study uses 25% to automatically identify a primary factor quantitatively. Factors comprising less than 25% of the reference total are subject to a qualitative judgment that may or may not identify additional

primary factors. The next section will describe the qualitative analysis in detail. The primary factors of all combat narratives are listed and categorized to determine the most significant motivational factors among American combat troops in Vietnam.

### **Minor Factors**

From the data collection, any motivational factor which does not exceed a percentage rating of 25% and is greater than 0% is a minor factor. The label of minor factor is not given to a motivational factor that is significant as determined by the qualitative judgment. For example, a combat narrative may include only two or three references to religious convictions. The "religion" factor will have a corresponding low percentage rating. Yet, the author of the narrative may explain that his belief in God and his faith in his religion motivated him to continue to perform his duty. In this example, the qualitative analysis would determine that religion is a primary factor. Holsti argues that "content analysis should use qualitative and quantitative methods to supplement each other" (11). This study uses both to help ensure that primary motivational factors are correctly identified.

### **Data Sources**

Table 5 lists the combat narratives that serve as the source of data. The narratives represent a cross section of the Vietnam experience. Attention was given to the author's rank, military experience, dates and location of service. The narratives are at least 100 pages in length so that adequate references to motivation can be tallied.

## **Experimental Design**

Table 6 illustrates the breakdown of each combat narrative by category and group. Each narrative is listed according to the appropriate group in each category. This study compares the results of the content analysis and groups them within each category. A good distribution of narratives in each group is important so that no one group is over or under represented.

For the most part, the narratives were chosen simply through availability. Attention was given to the rank of the authors for an even distribution of officers and enlisted men. Particular attention was given to the dates of combat experience. The narratives used represent combat experiences from before and after the 1968 TET Offensive. Chapter V addresses the dates of combat experiences more in depth.

Table 5. Combat Narratives

<i>LRRP Team Leader</i> by John Burford
<i>A Rumor Of War</i> by Philip Caputo
<i>Oh, God I'm Dead</i> by Allen Clark
<i>Fifty-Caliber Firepower</i> by William Claudio
<i>Once a Warrior King</i> by David Donovan
<i>The Killing Zone</i> by Frederick Downs
<i>Vietnam - Perkasio</i> by W.D. Ehrhart
<i>The War In I Corps</i> by Richard Guidry
<i>Reluctant Warrior</i> by Micael Hodgins
<i>War In Aquarius</i> by Dennis Kitchin
<i>Where the Rivers Ran Backward</i> by William Merritt
<i>Platoon Leader</i> by James R. McDonough
<i>We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young</i> by Hal Moore
<i>Suicide Charlie</i> by Norman L. Russell
<i>Not By the Book</i> by Eric Smith
<i>Tan Phu</i> by Leigh Wade
<i>In Pharaoh's Army</i> by Tobias Wolff
<i>Hard To Forget</i> by Steven Yedinak

Table 6. Groups and Categories

Category	Group	Sources
Rank	Officer	Caputo, Clark, Donovan, Downs, Hodgins, McDonough, Moore, Smith, Wolff, Yedinak
	Enlisted	Burford, Claudio, Ehrhart, Guidry, Kitchin, Merritt, Russell, Wade
Time In Country	Before TET	Caputo, Clark, Claudio, Downs, Ehrhart, Guidry, Moore, Wade, Wolff, Yedinak
	After TET	Burford, Donovan, Hodgins, Kitchin, Merritt, McDonough, Russell, Smith
Military Experience	New Soldier	Caputo, Claudio, Donovan, Downs, Ehrhart, Guidry, Kitchin, Merritt, Russell
	Veteran	Burford, Clark, Hodgins, McDonough, Moore, Smith, Wade, Wolff, Yedinak
Location	Northern	Burford, Caputo, Ehrhart, Guidry, Hodgins
	Central	Claudio, Downs, Kitchin, McDonough, Merritt, Moore, Smith, Yedinak
	Southern	Clark, Donovan, Russell, Wade, Wolff

## IV. Results - Individual Narratives

### **Introduction**

This chapter includes the results from the analysis of the seventeen combat narratives that comprise the data sources. Several figures and tables in Chapter V provide a response to the investigative questions of this research. The authors of the narratives reveal different aspects of the Vietnam experience along with many similarities. The following descriptions of each narrative describe the similarities and differences and are discussed in alphabetical order.

### **Burford**

John Burford's *LRRP Team Leader* is different from other combat narratives. Burford's role was different from most combat infantrymen in Vietnam and he explains those differences in his book. Burford reveals few of the factors that motivated him. *LRRP Team Leader* is a matter-of-fact description of the combat situations that Burford faced in the northern part of South Vietnam from July 1968 through December of the same year. Burford offers little explanation of his feelings throughout the narrative and, consequently, the prominent motivational factors are rare. One-third of the references relate to primary group concerns and that total corresponds to the unique mission of the five man long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) that would operate in NVA safe areas for nearly a week at a time. Burford, as much as anyone else, depended on his fellow unit members to survive and felt a strong need to perform to keep the others alive. Burford makes cursory references to other factors, but none as significantly as the primary group influence.



## Caputo

Philip Caputo details his experiences as a Marine Corps lieutenant in *A Rumor of War*. Caputo entered the service as a volunteer after college and saw action with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment in the area around Danang from March 1965 through July 1966. At the time of his service, Caputo was 23 years old and faced court-martial charges that caused him to stay in Vietnam longer than the normal one-year tour of duty.

Most of Caputo's narrative focuses on the atrocities that the author witnessed during his tour of duty. In fact, much of the writing is a confession of Caputo's own sins. The largest number of references to motivational factors relates to his vindictiveness. At one point, Caputo explains exactly how he feels towards the enemy:

I burned with a hatred for the Viet Cong and with an emotion that dwells in most of us, one closer to the surface than we care to admit: a desire for retribution. I did not hate the enemy for their politics, but for murdering Simpson, for executing that boy whose body had been found in the river, for blasting the life out of Walt Levy. Revenge was one of the reasons I volunteered for a line company. I wanted a chance to kill somebody.  
(Caputo, 1977:219)

Throughout the narrative, references to vindictive feelings account for 22.2% of all references to motivational factors, the highest percentage of any factor. Allegiance to the primary group was second with 18.5%, with combat survival comprising 14.8% of the references.

Given Caputo's admission of strong vindictive feelings, and the fact that vindictiveness comprised nearly one quarter of all the references, vindictiveness was a primary motivational factor that compelled Caputo to fight.

## **Clark**

After losing both of his legs below the knees in Vietnam, Allen Clark decided to write his autobiography, *Oh, God I'm Dead*. In the portion of the book that covers his service in Vietnam from August 1966 through June 1967, Clark explains that his sense of duty compelled him to volunteer for dangerous assignments and caused his injuries. Clark often mentions West Point and how his military academy background instilled a strong sense of "duty, honor, country." Clark volunteered for Vietnam because he knew his classmates were there and he felt he owed it to them. Then, Clark did not feel comfortable with his rear echelon job on the coast, so he volunteered to be an intelligence officer with the Green Berets and lead insertions into Cambodia. Clark never shunned dangerous assignments because duty was his primary motivational factor.

## **Claudio**

William Claudio wrote *Fifty-Caliber Firepower* in 1996 and the narrative covers the period from April 1967 through April 1968. Claudio was drafted into the army, but his combat narrative displays all types of motivation. No single factor was primarily responsible for Claudio's motivation because Claudio made little mention of motivational factors and mentioned no factor more than twice. Beyond that, Claudio's writing is the most crudely written and least introspective of all the narratives.

## Donovan

In *Once a Warrior King*, David Donovan describes the time he spent as a leader of a Military Assistance Command (MAC) team in the Mekong Delta from the spring of 1969 through the spring of 1970. Donovan and four subordinates were isolated from other American military units and were responsible for demonstrating combat techniques to a local militia force. The isolation of the five men from other American forces compelled the author and his subordinates to develop a sense of dependency among each other. The dependency among the team members yields many references to primary group motivation. Donovan also addresses the fact that his ideology was necessary to carry out the mission of training local militia forces.

Donovan addresses religion only once, but he makes a strong argument for the importance that religion played in his combat life. He states that his own religious life was limited, but in Vietnam he developed "the consistent practice of saying a prayer twice a day" (Donovan, 1985: 265). He goes on to claim that the Army life is not conducive to religious devotion, but combat compelled him to pray regularly.

Throughout *Once a Warrior King*, Donovan rarely mentions any anticipation he felt for leaving Vietnam and returning home. Most of the other authors describe their feelings as their DEROS (date expected to return from overseas) approaches. Some authors focus on their DEROS and continually count down their remaining days. In contrast, Donovan describes a depression he feels when he is notified that he is to return home. His primary motivational factors were primary group and ideology and his ideology focuses on helping the Vietnamese in the local village. Returning home prevents Donovan from completing his ideological mission and he sees leaving the country as a failure on his part.

## **Downs**

If there was a stereotypical experience for a Second Lieutenant in the Vietnam War, Frederick Downs lived it. In *The Killing Zone*, he describes his life as a platoon leader operating in the central highlands from September 1967 through January 1968. Downs left Vietnam before his one-year tour due to serious wounds inflicted by a land mine. Before he was forced to leave his platoon, Downs felt a desire to provide strong leadership for his men and to survive the combat situations. At one point in the book, Downs explains that:

The philosophical arguments in favor of man's ability to resist the slide into barbarism sound noble and rational in a classroom or at a cocktail party. But when the enemy is bearing down, bent on taking your life away from you, it's not his country against your country, not his army against your army, not his philosophy against your philosophy - it's the fact that that son-of-a-bitch is trying to kill you and you'd better kill him first.  
(Downs, 1978: 149)

In fact, 38.5% of Downs's references to motivation relate to combat survival. Another 30.8% relate to leadership. Beyond combat survival and leadership, there are no other primary factors of motivation in *The Killing Zone*.

## **Ehrhart**

William Ehrhart was fresh out of high school when he enlisted in the Marine Corps during the summer of 1966. By February 1967, he was serving near the DMZ as an intelligence assistant. Most of Ehrhart's time in combat consisted of surviving mortar attacks. Then, during the TET Offensive, he found himself fighting door to door in the city of Hue. By the time Ehrhart left Vietnam in February 1968, he had earned the Purple Heart and had been promoted to sergeant.

Ehrhart's writing focuses on the conversations among soldiers in combat. He mixes in some humorous sarcasm that explains his tendency towards poetry in later writings. Because much of the writing is a recollection of dialogue rather than narration, Ehrhart reveals the motivational factors that were influential during his service in small amounts. In fact, there is no primary motivational factor that compelled Ehrhart to fight. Many factors, such as the primary group, ideology, vindictiveness, coercion, duty, combat survival, and training, made small contributions to Ehrhart's motivation. Usually, the circumstance dictated the motivational factor. When his friends were chosen for a patrol, he wanted to go. When Ehrhart lamented the loss of many close friends, he fought for revenge. When caught in the heavy fighting of the TET Offensive, he fought to survive. William Ehrhart was motivated by no primary motivational factor, but by several secondary factors.

## **Guidry**

For a good portion of his time in Vietnam, Richard Guidry experienced above average leadership. Guidry fought along the de-militarized zone (DMZ) from April 1967, through May 1968 as a Private First Class (PFC) in the United States Marine Corps. A passage from *The War in I Corps* details Guidry's experience with quality leadership:

The stocky little staff sergeant knew how to handle men, a fact that showed clearly over the next few days of hard work. Laboring under a merciless sun, he cajoled and badgered us as needed to motivate us to complete the adjustments to the perimeter. The biggest motivation, which raised our morale, was that he worked right alongside us, filling sandbags and digging trenches with greater vigor than anyone. (Guidry, 1998: 44)

Guidry does not mention leadership often, but when he does, it is apparent that leadership is a factor that compels him to perform in a combat environment.

Throughout his writing, Guidry mentions his role as a marine and the need to perform to the standards of a marine. Many times, he followed orders simply because that was his duty as a member of the United States Marine Corps. Guidry was not a supporter of the Vietnam War, but he tried not to let those feelings affect his performance. While debating the merits of helping the local Vietnamese Guidry writes, "no matter how I felt about the war, I was a U.S. Marine and would do my duty" (Guidry, 1998: 138). For a low ranking marine in combat, leadership and duty were the primary factors of motivation.

### **Hodgins**

As a prior enlisted member in the Marine Corps, Lieutenant Michael Hodgins drew upon his experience to help him through his tour of duty in Vietnam. Hodgins chose to write only about his time as the leader of a reconnaissance platoon from March 1970 through May 1970. He did not write about his other assignments during his one-year tour.

The two primary motivational factors for Hodgins were combat survival and training. He felt very comfortable with what he learned during his previous years in the Marines. While preparing for a reconnaissance mission, Hodgins writes, "putting my training to use gave me a sense of confidence and helped me overcome my personal fear" (Hodgins, 75). He is the only author that was primarily motivated by training, but one of many who was motivated by combat survival.

## **Kitchin**

*War in Aquarius* includes a lengthy description of a mutiny by several infantrymen during the time from December 1968 through November 1969 when the author's unit operated near the Cambodian border. Such an incident yields interesting information for a study on combat motivation. The author, Dennis Kitchin, was separated from his fellow infantrymen during the revolt and, therefore, spared the repercussions although he states that he might have been a part of the mutiny. Most of Kitchin's motivation came from his allegiance to his squad and the desire to survive combat. Kitchin writes, "your only obsession is with your own safety and that of your immediate pocket of friends" (Kitchin, 1994:151). Clearly, the primary group was a motivating factor for Kitchin and comprises 25% of the references in *War in Aquarius*.

Several interesting passages in the narrative describe instances when Kitchin neglected his duty to increase his chances of survival. Kitchin believes that "the personal survival of the men in the [platoon] superseded the welfare of [the base]" (Kitchin, 1994: 68) and those feelings justified the times when he and his friends would fake night patrols and remain inside their bunkers. Kitchin's actions may not have been honorable, but his honesty in revealing those actions is crucial in determining what truly motivates men in combat.

## **Merritt**

William Merritt volunteered to join the Army to avoid the draft, but the Army still sent him to Vietnam in August 1968. Merritt's tour was cut short by VC attack on the bridge he was defending in November 1968. *Where the Rivers Run Backward* details the events that occurred around Merritt in Vietnam. He rarely discusses his own feeling and focuses on the people

around him. When Merritt does mention motivation, he describes his desire to avoid combat situations. He was detailed to paint tanks and he purposely painted slowly so that he could avoid going on patrol. In addition, Merritt reveals that he went to church on Sunday to avoid combat rather than to fulfill any religious convictions he had. Surviving combat was Merritt's ultimate goal and he was successful, although he suffered a severely wounded foot.

### **McDonough**

Leadership is the primary motivational factor for James R. McDonough in his book, *Platoon Leader*. McDonough served in the coastal plain of South Vietnam from August 1970 through August 1971. Other factors, such as the primary group and combat survival, comprise most of the other references to motivational factors, yet leadership is clearly the primary factor with more than 41% of the references. McDonough felt the need to display strong leadership rather than to respond to the leadership of others. Repeatedly, McDonough stresses the need, as the platoon leader, to demonstrate his ability to lead his men in the presence of danger.

McDonough graduated from West Point in 1969 at the top of his class. He volunteered to serve in Vietnam and to be an infantryman. In many ways, McDonough's internal motivation is much different from those of the other authors of combat narratives. Many of the other narratives reveal different primary motivational factors than those that compelled McDonough to serve because most authors were chosen to serve in Vietnam after they were drafted or volunteered for service. McDonough volunteered for military service and later volunteered to serve in Vietnam.



## Moore

Of all the narratives included in this study, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* covers the shortest amount of time. As a Lieutenant Colonel leading the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Hal Moore details the Battle of the Ia Drang. The fighting that occurred in November 1965 represented the largest battle to that point and introduced airborne cavalry assault to the Vietnam War. Moore describes a continual desire to insure that his decisions are correct and the men under his command witness proper leadership. Nearly 40% of the motivational references relate to leadership.

Additionally, Moore explains that many of his decisions were dictated by the need to help an isolated platoon. He cared deeply about the safety of that platoon to the point that he “was tortured by the fate of those men and the need to rescue them” (Moore, 1992: 139). Moore even admits to making poor battlefield decisions because of his allegiance to the primary group. His motivation to save those men overcame motivation to perform his duty as a battlefield commander and ensure the operation’s success. Although references to primary group motivation constitute only 22% of the total in *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*, the primary group is a primary motivational factor for Hal Moore.

## Russell

In *Suicide Charlie*, Norman L. Russell reveals the memorable events of his time in Vietnam. Russell was drafted in the spring of 1968 and served in Tay Ninh Province of southwest Vietnam from November 1968 through November 1969. A member of the US Army’s 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Russell began as a private and left Vietnam as a sergeant.

Most of the motivational references in *Suicide Charlie* pertain to primary group and combat survival influences. Primary group references compose 43.8% of the references while 25% of the references identify the author's motivation to survive combat. Therefore, both the primary group and combat survival are primary motivational factors that encouraged Russell while he was in combat.

### **Smith**

As an intelligence officer, Eric Smith was in a position to be motivated by factors other than those that motivated infantrymen. Yet, from July 1968 through April 1969, Smith experienced leadership and followership that produced a personal need to perform his duty and take care of his men. For the first half of his tour, First Lieutenant Smith worked at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division camp and took orders from a captain. For the second half of his tour, Smith was at a brigade camp where he was the officer giving orders to twelve subordinates. *Not By the Book* reflects Smith's feelings of accomplishing his mission regardless of Army regulations. As a follower, Smith was motivated to perform his duty as an intelligence officer and improve the inadequate document review process. As a leader, Smith continually strove to project strong leadership for the benefit of the men under his command. In his writing, Smith makes no mention of ideological motivation; nor does he cite combat survival as a motivating factor. Smith's experiences in Vietnam represent an interesting dichotomy that demonstrates that duty is important to followers and leadership is paramount to men in command.

## Wade

Leigh Wade went to Vietnam for the first time as a corporal in July 1963. As a Special Forces radio operator, his tour was 6 months long and he returned to the United States in December 1963 as a sergeant. While in Vietnam, Wade operated out of a camp named Tan Phu, hence the name of the narrative he wrote in 1997. *Tan Phu* describes Wade's experiences in the Mekong delta region of South Vietnam as an advisor to a South Vietnamese unit.

Wade describes the pleasure he derived from performing his duty as a Special Forces A-team member. He was anxious to go to Vietnam, especially at a time when the problems in Vietnam were not well documented and many outside of Vietnam were not aware of the true nature of the conflict. Throughout the narrative, Wade describes the difficulties he faced as an advisor while the enemy continually assaulted Tan Phu. One-third of his references to motivational factors relates to his desire to perform his duty. No other factor was primarily responsible for motivating Wade to fight the Viet Cong.

## Wolff

Tobias Wolff is an accomplished author with many completed works other than his combat narrative, *In Pharaoh's Army*. Wolff performed at a level in basic training that landed him in officer candidate school soon afterwards. Despite his time as a Green Beret, he went to Vietnam as an artillery officer and served as an advisor to a South Vietnamese artillery unit. In Vietnam, Wolff led a relatively comfortable life in permanent living quarters featuring a color television set and other modern conveniences. Other than the TET Offensive, Wolff had little combat experience and his writing reflects the lack of battlefield episodes. When Wolff does

refer to motivation, the reference has to do with duty and combat survival. Wolff served with one other American, so the primary group was of little importance.

## **Yedinak**

Steven Yedinak left a wife and two daughters behind when he went to Vietnam for the first time in March 1966. Despite the hardship of leaving family behind, Captain Yedinak was devoted to his duty as a Special Forces officer operating with a Cambodian guerrilla force. Throughout his year in Vietnam, Yedinak fought mainly to survive and to fulfill his mission as an infantry officer.

At one point, Yedinak had the good fortune of meeting John Wayne. The movie star asked Yedinak if he would like to be in his upcoming movie about green berets. Yedinak responded with, "Duke, we are fighting a real war here, and there is no . . . time for me to make a movie" (Yedinak, 69). His desire to perform his duty overcame any desire to seek glory in a Hollywood movie. Yedinak frequently mentions the pleasure he derived from serving in the Special Forces. He had a highly specialized job to perform and was committed to the concept of the Cambodian guerrilla force.

## V. Results - All Narratives

### Primary/Minor Motivational Factors

Table 7 shows how the individual authors compare to one another based on primary and minor motivational factors. William Claudio and William Ehrhart are the only authors without a primary motivational factor and two authors, William Merritt and Tobias Wolff, do not have any minor motivational factors. Three authors, Caputo, Donovan, and Hodgins all exhibit exclusive primary motivational factors. The remaining thirteen authors share primary factors with at least one other author and as many as seven other authors.

Table 7. Primary and Minor Motivational Factors

	BURFORD	CAPUTO	CLARK	CLAUDIO	DONOVAN	DOWNS	EHRHART	GUIDRY	HODGINS	KITCHIN	MCDONOUGH	MERRITT	MOORE	RUSSELL	SMITH	WADE	WOLFF	YEDINAK	Total "Primary"	Total "Minor"
PRIMARY GROUP	P	M		M	P	M	M	M	M	P	M		P	P	M	M		M	5	10
RELIGION			M	M	M					M					M			M	0	6
IDEOLOGY		M		M	P		M	M		M			M					M	1	7
LEADERSHIP	M	M			M	P		P	M		P		P	M	P	M		M	5	7
EXPECTATIONS		M				M										M			0	3
VINDICTIVENESS		P					M	M	M	M	M			M	M	M			1	8
COERCION	M	M					M			M									0	4
DUTY	M	M		M	M	M	M	P			M		M	M	P	P	P	P	5	9
COMBAT SURVIVAL	M	M	P	M	M	P	M	M	P	P	M	P	M	P		M	P	P	8	9
TRAINING		M		M			M		P				M						1	4
Total "Primary"	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2		
Total "Minor"	4	8	1	6	4	3	7	4	3	4	4	0	4	3	3	5	0	4		

P = Primary motivational factor  
 M = Minor motivational factor

## Rank

Ten of the authors of the narratives were officers and eight were enlisted. The following authors were officers at the time of their service in Vietnam: Caputo, Clark, Donovan, Downs, Hodgins, McDonough, Moore, Smith, Wolff, and Yedinak. The following authors were enlisted during their time in Vietnam: Burford, Claudio, Ehrhart, Guidry, Kitchin, Merritt, and Wade.

Table 8 and Figure 2 show how the primary motivational factors differed according to rank.

Table 8. Primary Motivational Factors By Rank

	OFFICER	ENLISTED
PRIMARY GROUP	2	3
RELIGION		
IDEOLOGY	1	
LEADERSHIP	4	1
EXPECTATIONS		
VINDICTIVENESS	1	
COERCION		
DUTY	3	2
COMBAT SURVIVAL	5	3
TRAINING	1	

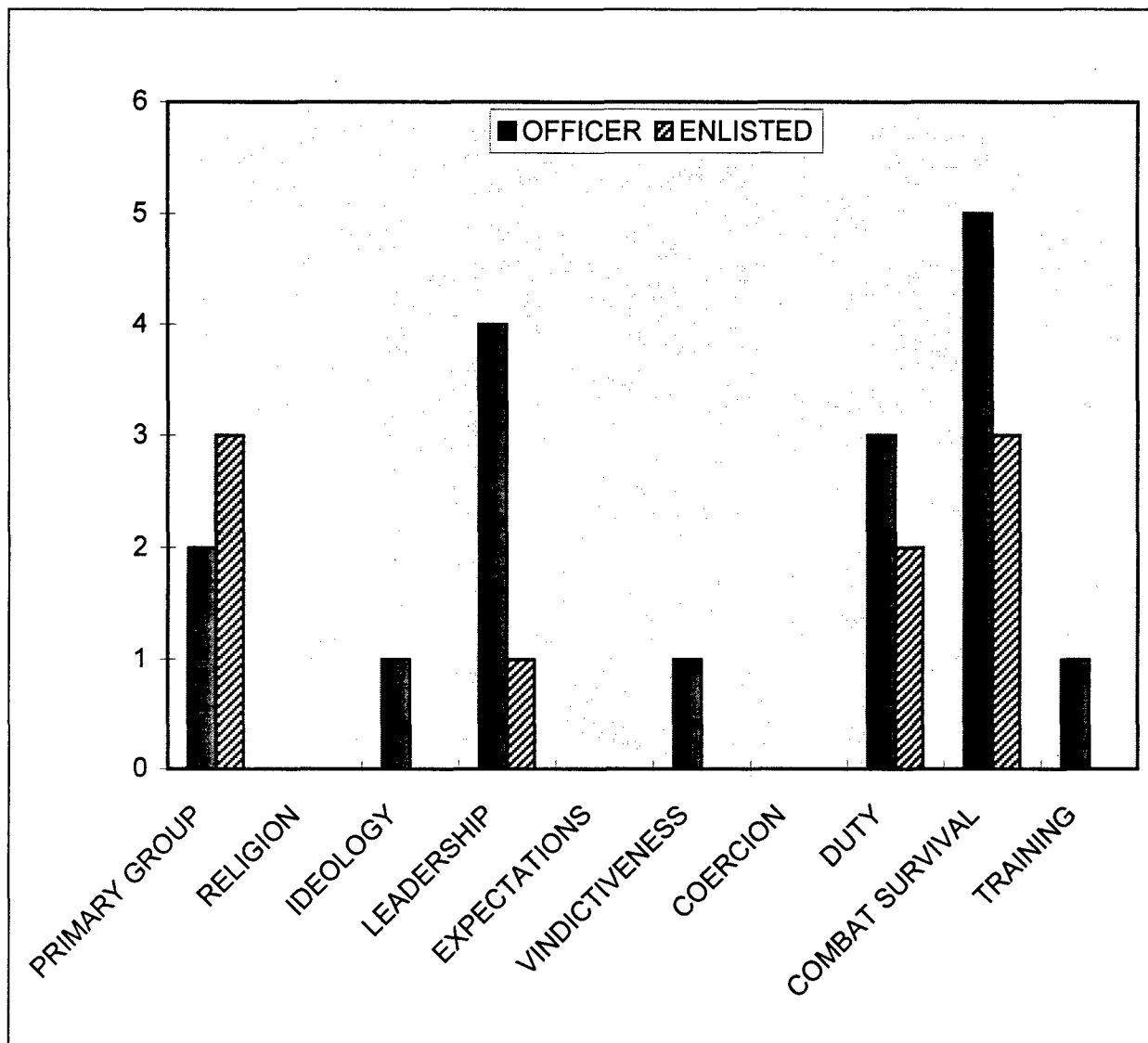


Figure 2. Primary Motivational Factors of Officers and Enlisted Men

## Dates of Combat Experience

The collection of narratives in this study covers the Vietnam War from July 1963 through August 1971. Table 9 identifies the time of combat experience for each author. A date must be identified to categorize motivational factors based on time of service. In this study, the TET Offensive of January 31, 1968 serves as the discriminating factor. TET represents a turning point in the war to which many can relate. The offensive educated many to the true nature of the war as well as serving as a wake-up call for those who may have thought that the United States military was in complete control of the fighting. As it turns out, TET also came at a point in time that represents the approximate halfway point of service by conventional American military forces.

Table 9. Dates of Combat Experience

1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
16		2	3	6	12	1	9	
		13	18	4		5	11	
				8		10		
				17		14		
				7	15			
<div> <div> 1 Burford, John  2 Caputo, Philp  3 Clark, Allen  4 Claudio, William  5 Donovan, David  6 Downs, Frederick  7 Ehrhart, W.D. </div> <div> 8 Guidry, Richard  9 Hodgins, Michae  10 Kitchin, Dennis  11 McDonough, James R.  12 Merritt, William  13 Moore, Hal  14 Russell, Norman L. </div> <div> 15 Smith, Eric McAllister  16 Wade, Leigh  17 Wolff, Tobias  18 Yedinak, Steven </div> </div>								



Ten authors served before TET and eight served after TET. Table 10 and Figure 3 show primary motivational factors before and after the TET Offensive. Five factors were primary motivators before the TET Offensive while six were primary motivators after January 1968. From this breakdown, the American soldier after TET fought for survival and the survival of their immediate friends. As the war became increasingly unpopular, the focus of the soldier shifted for typical military motivational factors to basic survival factors.

Table 10. Primary Motivational Factors By Time of Service

	BEFORE TET	AFTER TET
PRIMARY GROUP	1	4
RELIGION		
IDEOLOGY		1
LEADERSHIP	3	2
EXPECTATIONS		
VINDICTIVENESS	1	
COERCION		
DUTY	4	1
COMBAT SURVIVAL	4	4
TRAINING		1

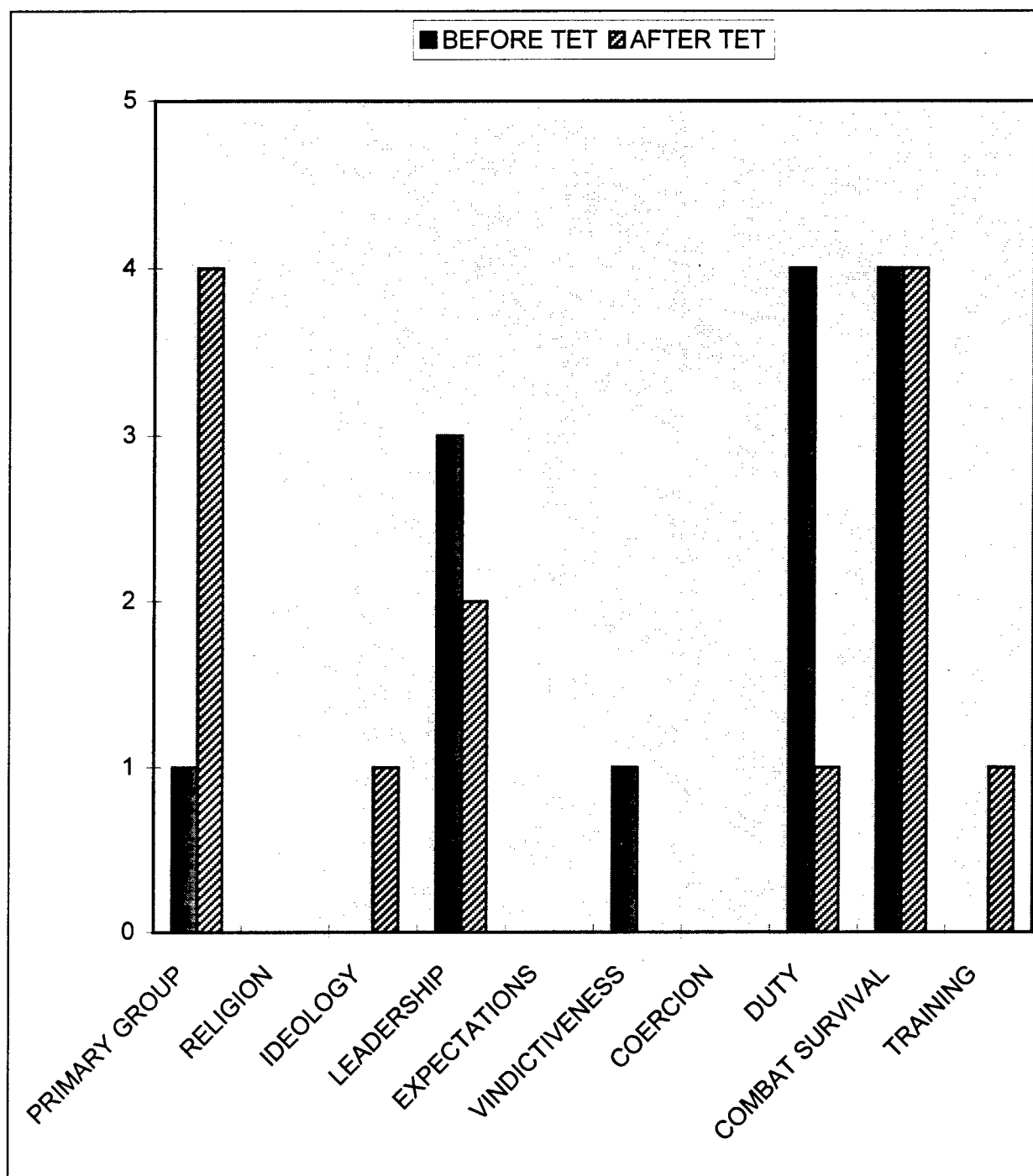


Figure 3. Primary Motivational Factors Before and After TET

## **Military Experience**

The experiences of combat troops may determine how those troops will react in combat. The authors in this study were new to the military when they began their service in Vietnam. Nine others, including Burford, Hodgins, Clark, McDonough, Moore, Smith, Wade, Wolff, and Yedinak had previous military service before they went to Vietnam. Table 11 and Figure 4 show the primary motivational factors of new and experienced soldiers. The new soldiers cited many more primary motivational factors than the experienced soldiers did. The new soldiers were motivated by whatever was important to them (vindictiveness, ideology) while the experienced men were compelled to fight for more traditional military virtues such as leadership and duty.

Table 11. Primary Motivational Factors of New and Experienced Soldiers

	NEW	EXPERIENCED
PRIMARY GROUP	3	2
RELIGION		
IDEOLOGY	1	
LEADERSHIP	2	3
EXPECTATIONS		
VINDICTIVENESS	1	
COERCION		
DUTY	1	4
COMBAT SURVIVAL	4	4
TRAINING		1

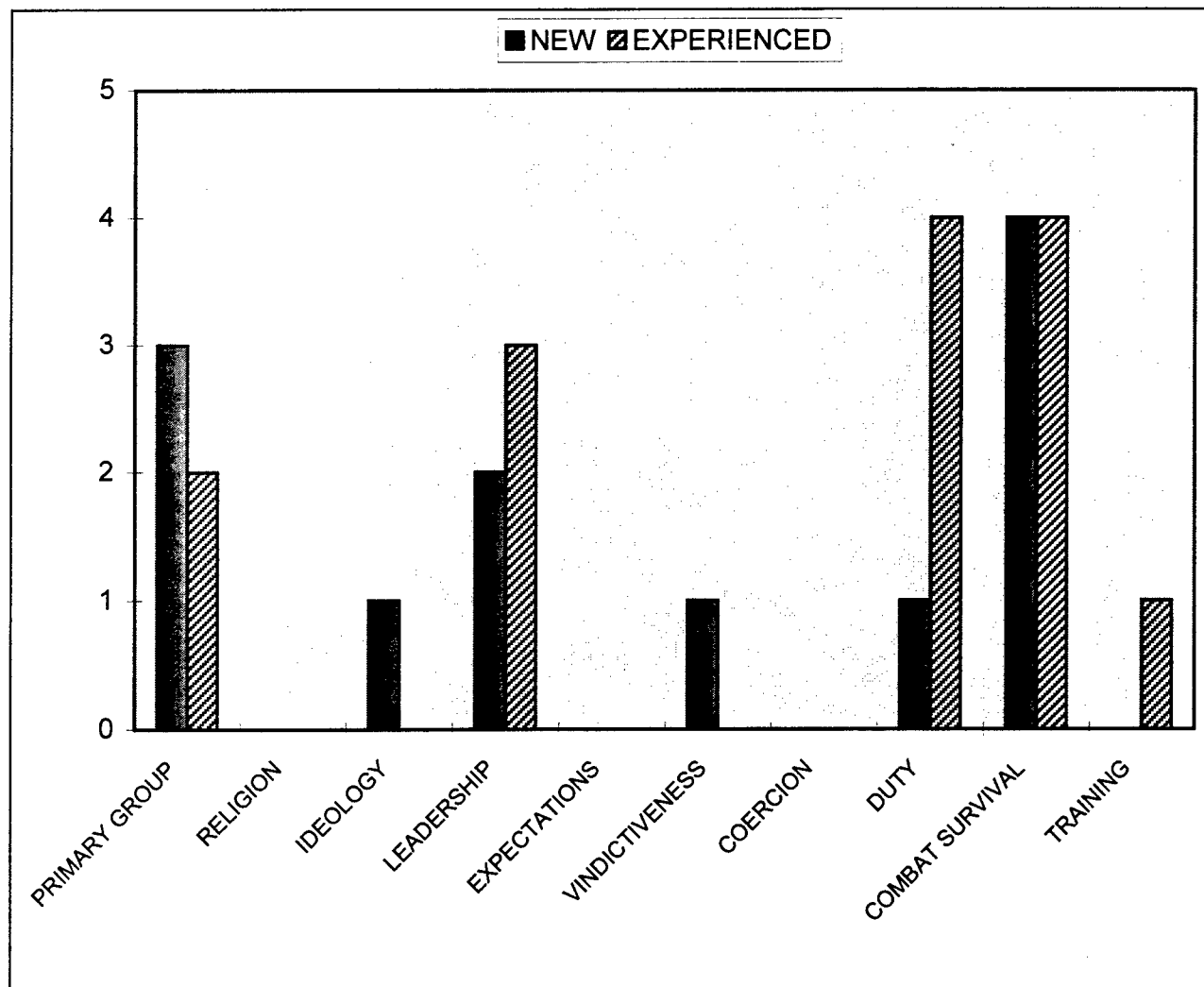


Figure 4. Primary Motivational Factors of New and Experienced Soldiers

## **Location**

Not all of the authors served in the same location of South Vietnam. Burford, Caputo, Ehrhart, Guidry, and Hodgins operated primarily in the northern part of South Vietnam. Claudio, Downs, Kitchin, Merritt, McDonough, Moore, Smith, and Yedinak saw action in very sections of the central part of South Vietnam. Donovan, Clark, Russell, Wade, and Wolff served in the southern part of the country in locations such as the Mekong Delta and Saigon. Table 12 and Figure 5 show the primary motivational factors based on geography. The soldiers in the north cited no one factor more than once as a primary motivator. The soldiers in the central and southern parts of the country shared common factors. The nature of the war was similar in all parts of South Vietnam, yet the primary motivators were different.

Table 12. Primary Motivational Factors Based on Geography

	NORTH	CENTRAL	SOUTH
PRIMARY GROUP	1	2	2
RELIGION			1
IDEOLOGY			
LEADERSHIP	1	4	
EXPECTATIONS			
VINDICTIVENESS	1		
COERCION			
DUTY	1	2	2
COMBAT SURVIVAL	1	4	3
TRAINING	1		

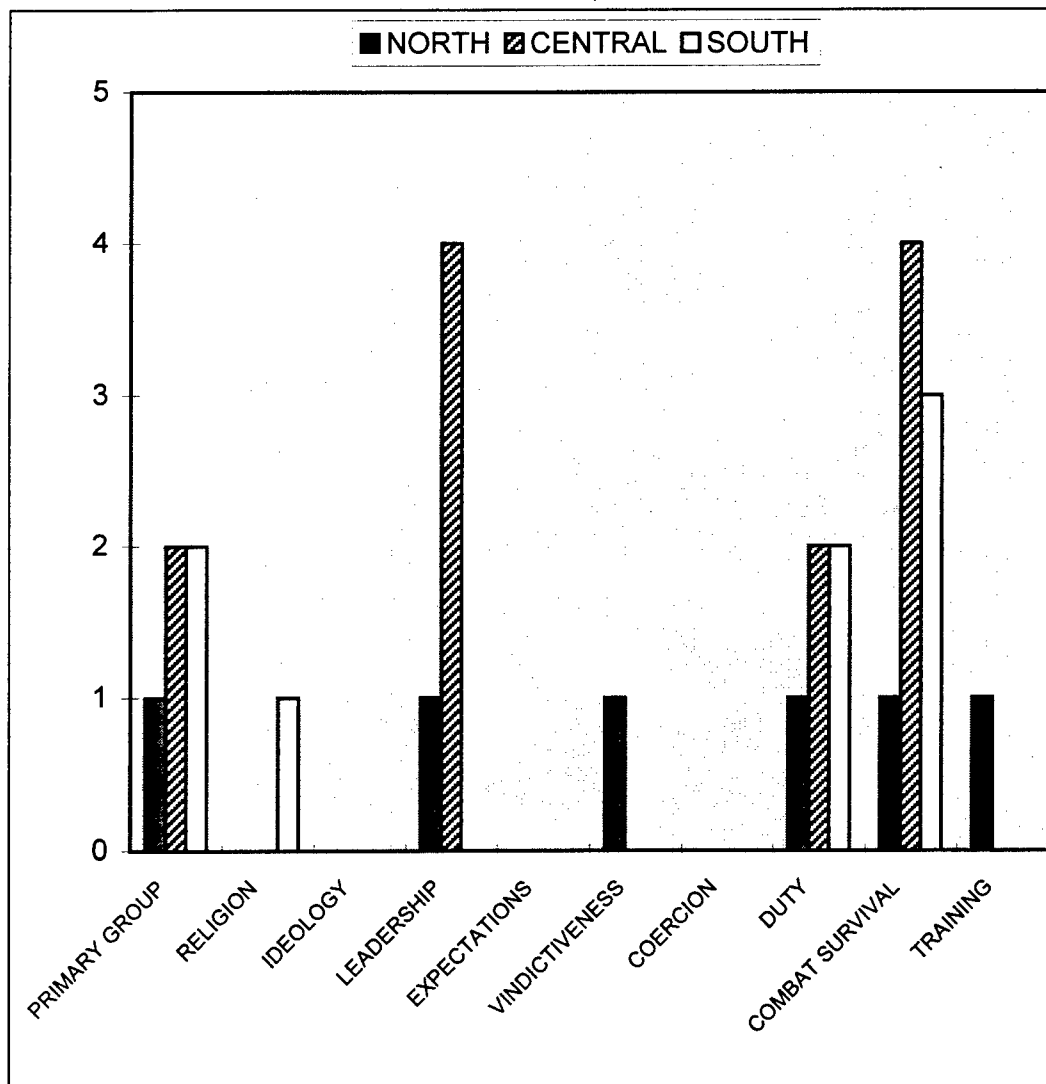


Figure 5. Primary Motivational Factors Based On Geographic Location

## Reference Totals

All authors demonstrated varying amounts of references to motivational factors. For example, *A Rumor of War* contained 27 references while *Fifty-Caliber Firepower* only included 7. Simply summing all the references could lead to skewed data, because Caputo's primary factor comprises more references than Claudio's does. However, it is helpful to see the total number of references by category. Table 13 and Figure 6 present the total references and percentages of each factor and also the "raw" data collected from each narrative.

Because references totals may be skewed by authors who write of motivation more often than others, a comparison should be made between references totals and primary factor totals. For primary motivational factors, the top four categories are combat survival (8), primary group (5), duty (5), and leadership (5). Reference totals of the raw data yield the top four categories of primary group (21%), combat survival (19%), leadership (17%), and duty (16%).

Just as some writers mention motivation more than others, some authors describe more combat situations. The length of the narratives in this study range from approximately 100 pages to over 400. Each author has his own literary style which makes assessment challenging. The length and style of the narrative dictate the amount of motivational references. As a minimum, this study does not include any narrative shorter than 100 pages. Letters home and chapters from larger works simply are not long enough to adequately portray the motivating factors in combat.

Table 13. References and Percentages

	PRIMARY GROUP	RELIGION	IDEOLOGY	LEADERSHIP	EXPEC- TATIONS	VINDIC- TIVENESS	COERCION	DUTY	COMBAT SURVIVAL	TRAINING
BURFORD	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	0
CAPUTO	5	0	1	2	4	6	3	1	4	1
CLARK	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
CLAUDIO	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
EHRHART	3	0	2	0	0	1	2	2	2	1
DONOVAN	4	1	3	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
DOWNNS	2	0	0	4	1	0	0	1	5	0
GUIDRY	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	4	2	0
HODGINS	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	3
KITCHIN	3	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	3	0
MCDONOUGH	4	0	0	7	0	1	0	2	3	0
MERRITT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
MOORE	4	0	2	7	0	0	0	3	1	1
RUSSELL	7	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	4	0
SMITH	2	1	0	5	0	2	0	5	0	0
WADE	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	2	0
WOLFF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
YEDINAK	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	4	4	0
TOTAL	44	8	13	37	6	15	8	35	40	7
PERCENTAGE	21%	4%	6%	17%	3%	7%	4%	16%	19%	3%

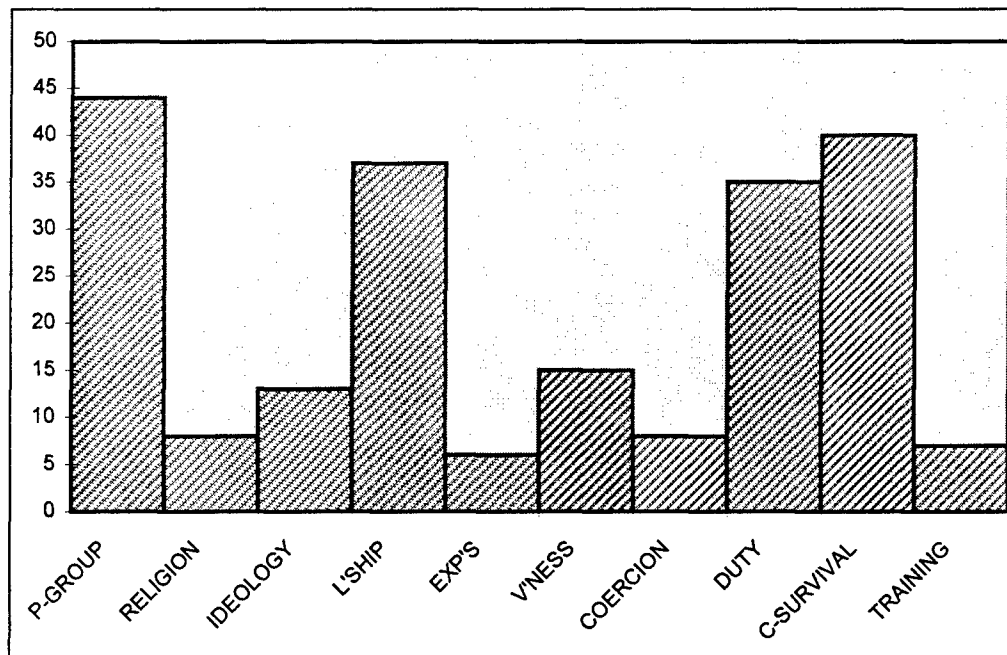


Figure 6. Total References



## VI. Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study of motivational factors. The results provide answers to all four investigative questions concerning rank, dates of combat experience, military experience, and locale. This study looks at all four categories to determine if different factors motivated the different groups in each category. Officers and enlisted men comprise the two groups in the rank category. The dates of combat experience are divided into two groups by the TET Offensive of January 31, 1968. Those authors who had military experience before the Vietnam War comprise one group within the military experience category while the authors with no military experience before their combat time comprise the other group. The last category, locale, includes three groups. This study examines the differences of serving in the northern, central, and southern parts of South Vietnam.

The overall purpose of this study is to determine the most prominent motivational factor that compelled American ground forces to fight in Vietnam. Interestingly, no one single factor stands out above the rest. This study identifies four motivational factors, all of which demonstrate approximately equal influence.

Chapter II reveals the motivational factors used in previous research. Most researchers agree on the basic elements of motivation, although all have slightly different lists of motivational factors. This study focuses on primary group, religion, ideology, leadership, expectations, vindictiveness, coercion, duty, combat survival, and training as motivational factors that compelled men to fight in Vietnam. The research here keeps a tally of all the references

made to motivational factors by the authors of the combat narratives. Those tallies provide an aggregate reference total used to examine the research objective. Additionally, this study identifies the primary motivational factor of each author so that the authors can be compared equally. The aggregate reference total includes many references from some narratives and few from others. The identification of primary factors makes the significance each author equal despite the total number of references in their respective narratives. The aggregate reference total and the primary factor total yield similar results.

## **Rank**

There is a clear difference between motivational factors that acted upon officers and those that acted upon enlisted men. Officers, as a whole, felt a greater need to provide a leadership example, while enlisted men focused on their primary group and combat survival. In addition, officers responded to many more of the potential motivational factors while fewer factors compelled enlisted men to fight.

Six of the eight authors who were enlisted men during the Vietnam War were also new to the military. Their inexperience may explain, in part, why the primary group and combat survival had a disproportionate amount of influence over their combat behavior. On the other hand, seven of the ten officers had previous military experience before they fought in Vietnam. Many of the officers were career-minded individuals who looked beyond the Vietnam War and acted according to the ideals of a military professional. Most of the enlisted men focused on the end of their tour and whatever it took to reach that goal.

## **Time of Service**

The narratives in this study demonstrated that duty was a primary motivational factor before the TET Offensive, but the emphasis on duty shifted to the primary group after TET. As mentioned earlier, the TET Offensive changed American's opinions about the war. As the narratives demonstrate, the American forces also went through a shift in attitude. If the Vietnam War was ever justified it was before TET. At that time, duty was an acceptable concept for which to fight. After TET, once the war lost any righteousness it may have had, fighting in Vietnam as a means to perform one's duty no longer became acceptable. The primary group became more important to the American soldier once duty lost its ability to motivate.

One constant motivator throughout the course of the war was combat survival. At all times, combat survival compelled men of all ranks and in all locations to continue to fight. For many apparent reasons, the old adage "kill or be killed" was as true in Vietnam as it was in past wars.

## **Military Experience**

Military experience played a less crucial role in determining primary motivational factors compared to rank and time of service. The only real contribution that military experience played was that of duty. Duty motivated the experienced soldiers much more so than it motivated the inexperienced soldiers. Many of the inexperienced soldiers were draftees or those who volunteered to avoid the draft. In either case, the military was not likely to be a career that the inexperienced soldier would pursue. Therefore, duty was less important to these men. The experienced soldiers obtained their experience primarily because they were focusing on a

military career. To these men, a sense of duty was important if they were to be successful in their careers. Many of these men volunteered to serve in Vietnam despite the inherent danger.

## **Geography**

The locale in which the soldiers fought had little to do with differences in motivation. Any slight differences were the result of the different roles common to the area of South Vietnam in question. Many of the authors who served in the south were advisors to non-American forces. These men had little opportunity to respond to or project strong leadership. More frequently, these men relied on a small primary group of fellow Americans.

The authors who served in the north and central regions of South Vietnam filled many different roles. Some served with traditional infantry units while others conducted small insertion missions. The multitude of missions yielded a wide range of primary motivational factors. The nature of the Vietnam War was such that any area could quickly become the battlefield. As a result, geography played a minimal role in determining the motivating factors of combat.

## **Research Answer**

The overall research question concerning the most prominent motivational factor does not have one answer. Four different factors, primary group, combat survival, leadership, and duty all significantly motivated American ground forces during the Vietnam War. These factors stand

out above the remaining potential motivational factors, as illustrated in Figure 6. All four factors are prominent among primary motivational factors as well as total overall references from all narratives.

## **Conclusions**

Of the four factors under investigation, rank provides the clearest delineation among motivational factors. Time of service also provides definite differences, but that may be an exclusive result of the Vietnam War. Vietnam has often been touted as the only war America lost. Whether the United States lost or not, the Vietnam War became intensely unpopular after the TET Offensive and the ground troops had to deal with that unpopularity.

The differences between motivating factors caused by rank in the Vietnam War may have as much to do with the draft as with anything else. Many of the enlisted men who fought were non-volunteers while a higher percentage of officers volunteered to serve. As volunteers, the officers were predisposed to a military career, while the draftees were content with serving out their tours. As an all-volunteer force, today's military may be less likely to see a large difference between motivating factors.

## **Recommendations**

This study was limited by the relatively small sample size ( $n = 18$ ). Any future research should include a larger sample to help differentiate among motivational factors. The samples

should all be approximately the same length to ensure that authors of longer narratives are not disproportionately affecting the results.

Another way to improve the work of this study is to use more than one researcher. With only one individual analyzing narratives, a potential for bias exists. No matter how defined the methodology, one unchecked researcher can miss some references to motivating factors. With more than one researcher, fewer references will go unnoticed.

A useful study would be to examine the motivating factors of the United States military during a period in time when the combats were all volunteers. Rank may not have as large an influence on an all-volunteer force as it did with the military of the Vietnam era. Operation Desert Storm may reveal that more soldiers fought for ideological reasons rather than to merely survive combat as many men in Vietnam did.

Finally, future research should focus on the primary group, combat survival, leadership, and duty for a more extensive examination. Factors such as religion and training, although important, simply were not primary motivating factors for troops in Vietnam. A closer look at the four most common factors identified in this study may reveal which factor, if any, was the most influential.

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### Vita

Captain Schum was born on 24 December 1971 in Chicago, Illinois. He moved to Alpine, California in 1983 and graduated from Granite Hills High School in 1990. Captain Schum entered the United States Air Force Academy in 1990 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Military History. He received his commission on 1 June 1994 upon graduation.

Captain Schum's first assignment was at Vandenberg AFB, California as a program manager for space vehicle test and evaluation, including payload facility operations. In May 1997, he entered the School of Logistics and Acquisition Management, Air Force Institute of Technology. Captain Schum's follow-on assignment is to the Human Systems Center located at Brooks AFB, Texas where he will be a program manager in a system program office responsible for human factors engineering projects.

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